

Chapter Eight

Tim meets his cousins, the Platts, for the first time. Four girls sleep in a tiny clapboard house and the two boys sleep in the barn. Tim feels grateful to have grown up in the tavern, which always had plenty of room for himself and Sam to sleep comfortably. In a cozy scene, the Platt family, Tim, and Father sit around a fireplace. Tim observes that he felt shy about meeting them, but they do not feel shy, because they are in their house. Mr. Platt and Father discuss the disintegration of law in many of the colonies, the threat of the cow-boys, and the open hostility between Tories and Rebels. Father defends Redding, saying that law and order still reign. Tim falls asleep and is soon taken up to bed by his cousin Ezekiel. The two boys speak of the war. Ezekiel criticizes Sam for joining the Rebel forces, and Tim stands up for Sam. Ezekiel asks Tim which side he would fight for if he had to, and Tim replies, "The loyalist, I guess." As he falls asleep, though, he imagines the horror of finding himself pitted in battle against Sam.

Father and Tim leave early the next morning and have no more trouble as they approach Verplancks Point, thanks to escorts along the way. Tim is impressed by the size and beauty of the Hudson River, and astounded when they arrive in Verplancks and see the widest part of the river and the fisherman in their skiffs. He watches the fishermen with interest but sees that they look dirty and exhausted by the end of the day. The trade is successful, and the Meekers spend the night in a tavern before continuing on their way home. They plan to take a long, safe way home, but snow begins coming down and they know they must get themselves and their oxen home as soon as possible. The oxen are already uncomfortable, slow and bawling from the snow, so Tim and Father stop finally to stay the icy night with the Platts.

Chapter Nine

When Tim and Father depart from the Platt house, the snow has covered the land and the ground is slippery and hard to travel. Their escort home has not met them, due to the heavy snowfall. They trek on, Tim behind with the cattle and Father riding ahead on his horse to check on the safety of the road. Tim feels frightened and lonely, but he

keeps going. The Meekers make it through Ridgebury with no problems. But they do not feel entirely safe yet, and Father rides up again to scout the path ahead. He takes longer than usual, and Tim passes the time by naming all of the countries in the world, stumbling over whether to count America, finally deciding not to. Tim begins to worry and think of possible reasons why Father has not returned yet, but he knows that none of his excuses are true. Tim tries unsuccessfully to speed up the oxen, then leaves them next to the road and jogs along, following Father's horse's tracks.

Tim comes to a space where the horse's tracks are surrounded and intermingled with tracks of many other horses and then trail away on the road. Tim knows instantly that Father has been ambushed by the cowboys. Tim prays, then panics, and runs into the woods to hide, trying to decide what to do. He wonders what Sam would have done, and concludes that Sam would do the brave, daring thing, which would be to rescue Father. It dawns on Tim that the bravest thing is not always the smartest thing, and he wonders what Father would do. Father would take the goods back home so that their tavern could make it through the winter. Tim runs back to the oxen and thumped them into motion.

As he moves along with the cart, he knows that the cow-boys will return, and slowly forms a plan for dealing with them. Night falls, and soon Tim spies three tall figures blocking the road ahead of him. Tim cries out, "Are you the escort? Am I ever glad to see you." The cow-boys ask what he means by talking about an escort. Tim feigns fearlessness and trust in them, and explains that his father called an escort in case the cow-boys came to harass them. The cow-boys begin to argue about whether to stay or leave. They want his goods, but they do not want to get ambushed by the coming escort. A dog barks, spooking them, and they flee. Tim begins to laugh and cry with relief and triumph. He has saved his family's goods, he has acted bravely and smartly, and he has a great story to tell Sam. He continues traveling through the night until he arrives home in Redding.

Chapter Ten

With neither Mr. Meeker nor Sam at home, Tim and his mother must

work overtime to keep up the tavern. Mrs. Meeker tells Tim not to worry, that God will forgive them for working Sundays. Tim thinks to himself that he was not worried. Business at the tavern is good, but because money is short, many people pay in commissary notes that will only have any value if the Rebels win the war. Mrs. Meeker has a discussion with Colonel Read, who has lost hope in the Rebel cause. Colonel Read mentions that Sam might not even be allowed to return home. Tim finds that since returning from Verplancks Point, he has felt a new responsibility for the tavern, a drive to do chores well, and an unwillingness to postpone work. He excitedly imagines showing off his knowledge of the tavern and its upkeep to Sam. Still, Tim misses his father and resents Sam's willingness to shirk family responsibility.

Winter passes, and on April 26, 1777, Tim hears an alarming thundering noise. He overhears a local black man named Ned telling Captain Betts that the noise is British troops marching in. Captain Betts sends Jerry Sanford to alert Mr. Rogers, another local Rebel. Tim notes how impressive the British army is, uniformed and spanning a mile on the little dirt road. He watches several officers go into Mr. Heron's house. Tim talks to an Irish member of the British army, and when the soldier asks why Tim is not afraid of him, Tim replies that his town is mostly Tories. Tim realizes as he speaks that he counts himself a Tory after watching Father's kidnap by Rebel cow-boys.

Events speed up and grow more violent. The officers break into Captain Betts' house as Tim watches in fear. The British seem organized and ready to move on when a Rebel messenger appears at the top of a hill and is shot down by the British. Colonel Read helps carry the bleeding men into the tavern and sends Tim to Dr. Hobart's house. Tim runs the two miles there through the woods. He is almost there when he hears gunshots, and drops into the woods to hide. From his hiding place, he observes the British army surrounding Captain Starr's house, where Starr and several other rebels, including Ned, are firing at the army. As Tim watches, the British enter the house and massacre the Rebels. Tim vomits when he sees Ned's head jumping in the air, sliced off by a British sword. The British soldiers burn the house and bodies, and as Tim continues to Dr. Hobart's house, he loses his sympathy for the British side and the Tories.

Chapter Eleven

Back in the tavern, Dr. Hobart removes the bullet, and the wounded Rebel messenger seems all right. Before passing out from all the rum he drank as an anesthetic, the wounded messenger tells the people in the tavern that Captain Benedict Arnold was preparing to bring his army through Redding in pursuit of the British. Tim knows Arnold is the leader of Sam's troop, and he hopes that Sam will return with them. Captain Betts runs into the tavern saying that the British let him go but kept Jerry Sanford. This puzzles Tim. Captain Betts tells Tim to ring the church bell to alert the town, but Mrs. Meeker forbids it. Tim is relieved, for he no longer wants to be involved in the war. Mrs. Meeker prays and then begins preparing dinner. Several Rebel officers burst in the tavern, demanding food and rum. One of these officers is Benedict Arnold, and upon seeing him, Tim races to a group of soldiers in front of the church across the street and asks for Sam. One soldier sympathizes with Tim and brings him inside, where he and Sam reunite, happily and tearfully.

Tim tells Sam about their father's capture. Sam knows, and has already tried unsuccessfully to get him out of prison. Sam hides in the barn and Tim runs inside and signals Mrs. Meeker to follow him outside. Tim brings Sam food, which he eats like he is starving. Mrs. Meeker tries to persuade Sam to return home after his enlistment ends in two months. Sam refuses, saying he has promised some of his friends in the army that they will all would stay in it until the British are beaten. Mrs. Meeker begins to argue with Sam, but Tim warns her that arguing will not change Sam's mind, and she falls quiet. As Tim says goodbye to his brother, he notes that for the first time he knows that Sam is wrong about something. Tim understands that despite Sam's hard soldier's life, Sam feels fulfilled by being part of something greater than himself. Tim suddenly feels like Sam's equal, not his little brother.